



External Assessment Report 2009

Subject	Modern Studies
Level	Advanced Higher

The statistics used in this report are pre-appeal.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers/lecturers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published question papers and marking instructions for the Examination.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

A total of 122 centres presented candidates for Advanced Higher Modern Studies in 2009 – a decrease of 4 from 2008 but candidate numbers rose by 93. The mean mark in the examination was 56.4 – a slight rise from 2008. The mean dissertation mark (29.1) was also up on the previous year.

98% of candidates were in S6. Many centres still over estimate their candidates' performance. This is mostly due to the fact that dissertations are not normally included in centre estimates which tend to be based solely on preliminary examinations.

'Improving Performance in Advanced Higher Modern Studies' report is on the SQA website. This should be read carefully and, if appropriate, shared with candidates. It can be found at:

http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/NQModernStudiesImprovingPerformanceAdvHigher.pdf

Areas in which candidates performed well

Dissertation

An increasing number of candidates produced high quality dissertations. The candidates had:

- chosen their topics carefully and ensured they were based on the study theme and contexts they were studying
- submitted their titles/hypothesis to SQA for approval (by 1st November)
- planned their dissertations carefully
- chosen an appropriately focused hypothesis that ensured good quality in-depth research
- chosen a hypothesis that was based on a current issue
- chosen aims that linked directly to the hypothesis and lent themselves to analysis and synthesis rather than description
- used a suitable selection of primary and secondary sources/research methods the results of which were well integrated into the dissertation
- read appropriate academic texts – not necessarily books but, for example, government reports
- attributed evidence clearly by means of consistent referencing and a bibliography
- researched, analysed and synthesised information and related it directly to the hypothesis
- used current and detailed exemplification
- drew sophisticated conclusions that directly tested the hypothesis
- fully described, justified and evaluated the research methods used in relation to gathering information linked to the hypothesis
- written between 4500 and 5000 words in the main body of the dissertation
- provided full, numbered appendices that included correspondence, interviews carried out, survey questions and results and anything else relevant to the research
- had proof read their dissertation
- used size 12 font with double line spacing and a word count on each page.

Written examination

Essays

A majority of candidates displayed good social, economic and political knowledge and understanding of the issues raised by the essay questions. Few candidates were out of their depth. In Study Theme 1: Comparative

Politics and Research Methods, most chose to answer questions on Contexts A and B comparing UK (including Scotland) with USA. Fewer chose to answer contexts C and D questions. The new Context D: The Politics of Influence was answered well by those who attempted it. A point to note is that 'interest/pressure groups' may now be referred to as just 'interest groups.' In Study Theme 2: Law and Order and Research Methods, the most popular questions were Contexts B and D. Few centres attempted Study Theme 3: European Union and Research Methods but, in general, the questions were answered well.

A number of candidates produced high quality essays. These candidates had:

- planned their answers before writing them
- structured their answers with a focused introduction, analysis, synthesis and conclusion that directly related to the question set
- answered the question that was set and did not attempt a pre-prepared answer
- developed points
- analysed the issue in depth and ensured that all sides of the argument were covered ie gave a balanced answer
- used relevant and current exemplification that was often referenced
- used appropriate quotations, for example, from academics
- did compare and contrast the UK (including Scotland) with the USA in Comparative Politics essays
- stuck to the time limit of one hour suggested for each essay
- developed conclusions that directly related to the question set and attempted to reach a decision based on the evidence in their essay
- engaged with the question in a manner that suggested they really understood the issue.

Research Methods

There is evidence of excellent teaching in this area and most candidates scored more than half marks. Across all study themes, all questions were answered well.

A number of candidates produced high quality answers. The candidates had:

Q5a

- explained what was meant by both web-based surveys and more traditional survey techniques
- developed points they were making.
- used specific research examples to exemplify their answer
- focused their answers.
- gave an expression of 'to what extent.'

Q5b

- covered both planning and conducting
- developed points they were making
- used specific examples from the topic eg the European Union, to exemplify their answer.

Q6a

- clearly understood what is meant by valid and reliable
- developed points they were making
- directly referred to the source
- focused their answers
- came to an overall conclusion as to the extent that valid and reliable conclusions could be made from the source.

Q6b

- developed points they were making
- genuinely compared and contrasted the differences between qualitative and quantitative research
- used specific research examples to exemplify their answer

- focused their answers.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Dissertations

- poor planning generally led to a poor quality dissertation. Note the mark allocation for the dissertation: 10 marks is given for the planning stages; 25 marks for analysis, synthesis and exemplification; 10 marks for conclusions that address the hypothesis
- titles/hypotheses can be submitted to SQA for approval before 1st November
- often there was lack of appropriate sources used; an overuse, in many cases, of general internet sites such as wikipedia and tutor2u
- where candidates had 'cut and pasted' to a large extent, this worked to the detriment of their own analysis and synthesis. For more information on plagiarism, the Improving Performance in Advanced Higher Modern Studies document should be consulted
- lack of attribution of evidence by means of consistent referencing and a bibliography
- many candidates did not have a sophisticated conclusion(s) that related directly to the testing of the hypothesis
- several candidates had not described, justified and evaluated the research methods used in relation to gathering suitable information linked to the hypothesis. Often the evaluation was generic. For example, what was good/bad about using the internet rather than an evaluation of a specific site they had used for the dissertation
- there were still a number of dissertations that contained far fewer than 5000 words. These candidates disadvantaged themselves in that full research and analysis and synthesis can be difficult to achieve in so few words
- fully numbered appendices that included correspondence, interviews carried out, survey questions and results and anything else relevant to the research were lacking in many dissertations
- surveys and questionnaires in which it was quite obvious that the candidate had rushed the product and the process and hence the results were often rather dubious
- evidence of research in the appendices that was not used in the dissertation and vice versa
- candidates sharing the same research with no acknowledgement of whether the research was carried out by one candidate or indeed a number of them.
- several had obviously not proof read their dissertation
- the word count on each page was missing in some cases, leading to a danger of a penalty being imposed.

Examination

Essays

- candidates who used a pre-prepared answer rather than answer the question that was set tended to perform poorly. This was particularly the case in Study Theme 2: Section A: Question 4: the Penal System
- specific and relevant exemplification was often lacking
- in the Law and Order questions, several candidates wrote at length about various sociological theories but did not relate them to the question set
- often candidates from the same centre used a formulaic approach to an answer. This tends to restrict candidates' responses.
- although this is now less of an issue, some candidates did not give a balanced answer.

Research methods

- some candidates listed points. To get a good mark, candidates need to develop three or four points depending on the mark allocation. In general, up to 3 marks can be awarded for a well developed point
- a distinction between validity and reliability is often lacking in an answer especially in Question 6a
- in Question 6a, the source must be overtly used in the answer. Some candidates did not do this
- the majority of candidates did not evaluate the extent to which valid and reliable conclusions could be drawn from the source. Likewise, in question 5a, many did not come to an overall conclusion ie 'to what extent.' This led to a loss of marks
- candidates should give specific research examples in this section.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Note that there are new and amended Arrangements for Advanced Higher Modern Studies available on the SQA website. There are also new NABs. An 'Approved Dissertation List' is available.

Centres that recognise from candidate performance in NABs and prelims that they have marginal candidates should pay particular attention to advice on how to answer exam questions and how to complete a dissertation. This advice can be found in the previous Principal Assessors' reports (EAR) or in the document "Improving Performance in Advanced Higher Modern Studies", all of which are available on the SQA website.

Dissertations

Centres can assist candidates if they:

- take time at the planning stage to clarify their aims and methods
- ensure the number of aims is not excessive; around three or four aims with a maximum of one that is descriptive
- start early and give firm deadlines to the candidates ensuring, as far as possible, that they are adhered to
- stress that synthesis and balanced analysis are crucial and candidates may need to practise these skills
- ensure that research methods are described, evaluated and justified as a natural part of the process of carrying out the dissertation research
- use the mark check sheet for the dissertation that is available on the website particularly noting the breakdown of marks for the dissertation: 10 marks – Introductory/planning sections; 25 marks – analysis, synthesis and exemplification; 10 marks – conclusions that address the hypothesis: total = 45 marks.

Examination

Candidates will improve their performance when:

- essays answer the question set
- essays are balanced with in depth analysis and synthesis
- essays have relevant, current and in-depth exemplification
- conclusion(s) must relate to the question set
- research methods answers display depth of knowledge with relevant and specific exemplification. It is worth centres refreshing their understanding of the section on Research Methods in the 2009 Arrangements Document.

These points are explained in more detail in the document “Improving performance in Advanced Higher Modern Studies”.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2008	644
Number of resulted entries in 2009	737

Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark -				
A	31.3%	31.3%	231	94
B	33.8%	65.1%	249	80
C	23.6%	88.7%	174	67
D	4.1%	92.8%	30	60
No award	7.2%	100.0%	53	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

- While SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary) and a well prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional A boundary), it is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level.
- Each year SQA therefore holds a grade boundary meeting for each subject at each level where it brings together all the information available (statistical and judgemental). The Principal Assessor and SQA Qualifications Manager meet with the relevant SQA Business Manager and Statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. The meetings are chaired by members of the management team at SQA.
- The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the exam is more challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.
- An exam paper at a particular level in a subject in one year tends to have a marginally different set of grade boundaries from exam papers in that subject at that level in other years. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. If SQA has already altered a boundary in a particular year in say Higher Chemistry this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter boundaries in their prelim exam in Higher Chemistry. The two are not that closely related as they do not contain identical questions.
- SQA's main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

